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ABSTRACT

To improve Chippewa Indian retention in higher education, 277 Indian students, 7 key informants, and 11 service providers were surveyed to determine facilitating factors as well as obstacles. Of the 277 students, 125 responded to the questionnaire. The sample included former college graduates, college dropouts, and current students. Service providers were college faculty and staff from Minnesota and one border institution. Factors which contributed to remaining through graduation included personal motivation, adequate parental and financial support, positive faculty responsiveness, and support of friends. Impacting factors on college completion also included parents' level of education and attitudes, identified career goals, and attendance at Indian student organization meetings. All three survey groups reported inadequacies in precollege advisement and academic preparation, poor study skills, and lack of funds and child care services. Key informants cited as an additional obstacle cultural alienation while service providers indicated a need for American Indian faculty and staff. Indian student retention will be most facilitated by family and Indian community support, improved high school preparation, precollege workshops, additional financial aid, institutional commitment to Indian student support, and encouragement of return to college by dropouts. (MM)

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A HIGHER EDUCATION STUDY

OF

MINNESOTA CHIPPEWA TRIBAL STUDENTS

1983

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Preface

The retention of Indian students in higher education institutions is a serious concern. Experience and research indicate that a large majority of Indian students drop out before they complete their college degrees. In the current study, 16% of the sample reported completing four or more years of co-lege and only 12% reported completing a bachelor's degree.

We believe that retention can be increased if the right people can get accurate information about the reasons for low retention among Indian students. Current and past Indian students and sensitive people who work on an ongoing basis with these students have insights into factors that could promote retention and reduce the rate of dropping out. The purpose of this study is to collect these insights and to share them with the most appropriate people. The Indian community, the administration, faculty, and staff at institutions of higher education, and the support staff of Indian students are viewed as the groups who could most use these insights to promote retention among Indian students.

The need for research on retention has been increasingly evident since the advent of Indian self-determination in which some tribes were assuming control over their education programs. Representatives of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe sought to identify previous research in discussions with a variety of Indian professionals and private citizens throughout Minnesota. After reviewing with them the research data which was previously available, it was determined that 1) relatively little data was available and 2) the data which was available was outdated and in BIA reports written primarily by non-Indians who focused on "more drop-outs than completions" among Indian students.

In conclusion, this study was conducted for the benefit of Indian students. The report is intended to provide comprehensive, up-to-date information that will promote retention among Indian students in higher education. It is for the Indian community so their role will be known. It is for the institutions so they may understand how to assist Indian students. It is also for support staff for Indian students so they may fulfill their role more effectively.

A STUDY OF CHIPPEWA INDIAN RETENTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

During the last half of 1980 and the beginning of 1981, a study was conducted forthe purpose of gathering information which would be helpful in increasing retention of Indian students in higher education. This study was conducted by the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (MCT) with the assistance of faculty and students in the School of Social Development (SSD) at UMD. This report will describe the methodology used in the study, the results obtained from the study, and the tentative conclusions that may be drawn based on the results.

The study was composed of three elements. The first element was a survey of students who received financial aid from the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Scholarship Office. The second component of the study was a survey of college faculty and staff who provided service to Indian students in the state of Minnesota and in one border institution. The third element of the study was a series of interviews with key informants thought to be especially knowledgeable about the topic addressed in this study. The methodology and results of each of these elements will be described below.

Survey of Indian Students

Methodology and Results

A key element of this study was a survey of students who received financial aid from the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe during the past ten years. The random sample of 277 formal and current students included former students who graduated from college, those who left college before receiving their degree, and current students.

The questionnaire that was used in the interview format was developed based on two preliminary drafts. One draft was based on a literature search

and key informant interviews and was developed by three graduate students in SSD. Another draft was developed by Larry Aitken, in consultation with other professionals in higher education who were well informed about the experiences of American Indian college students. The final questionnaire was developed through meetings between SSD representatives and several members of the Indian community.

The interviews were conducted by current and former American Indian students. Each interviewer participated in two training sessions to familiarize them with the questionnaire and interviewing techniques. In addition, each interviewer was asked to conduct two pre-test interviews, and the results of these interviews were examined to assure that they were completed properly.

The interviews began in the summer of 1980 and were completed in the spring of 1981. Several questionnaires were mailed to respondants when distance made interviews impractical, although most of the questionnaires were completed through person-to-person interviews. Of 277 persons in the sample, 125 persons (44%) completed and responded to the questionnaire by agreeing to be interviewed or by mailing their responses. The response rate was limited by inability to locate some of the people selected in the sample and occasionally by potential interviewees declining to participate in this study.

Results

The results of the study can provide insights into many areas that affect retention of Indian students in colleges and universities. Only the most significant findings will be reported in this summary.

Several questions elicit information regarding the characteristics of the group who responded to the interview. Thirty-five percent of the respondents were male and 65% were female. Respondents were enrolled in all six reservations of MCT in approximate proportion to the size of the reservations. The respondents ranged evenly over an age range from 18 to 40, with only 14% of their respondents being over 40 years of age. Thirty two percent of the sample were current students while 68% had attended colleges or universities previously.

Three questions elicited information about the extent of the respondents' college education and the perceived value of this education. Among this sample, 41% of the students reported that they completed less than one year of college, 16% reported that they completed one to two years of college, 14% reported two to three years completed, 7% reported three to four years of college completed and 16% reported four or more years completed. When asked what degrees they had received since high school, 7% had received associate degrees, 12% had received bachelor degrees, 3% had received graduate degrees and 10% reported receiving a variety of other degrees. When asked to rate the overall experience they had while attending college, 67% reported this experience to be either very valuable and valuable, 24% reported the experience to be of some or little value, and only 2% reported the experience to be worthless.

Several questions sought information on pre-college experiences. Over 80% of the respondents reported that they received no information from their high school on the following six areas, 1) vocational professional goals, 2) choosing the college that best suits you, 3) assisting with forms on expenses for college, 4) helping you get accepted for college, 5) telling you what to expect in college, 6) budgeting funds. Twenty-one percent of

the sampel reported that they were either well prepared or very well prepared academically for college level work, and 76% reported that they were either somewhat prepared or not at all preapred. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents described themselves as either well prepared or very well prepared socially for college life, and 58% described themselves as somewhat prepared or not at all prepared. When asked about more specific areas, the following results were obtained:

	generally prepared	generally not prepared
reading skills	97	25
writing skills	79	43
math skills	65	55
study skills	51	71
interpersonal skills	93	29

Thus, study skills, math skills, and writing skills were areas of relatively less adequate preparation.

Several items in the questionnaire contained information about funding for college education. The results of one question indicated that a large majority of the students (about 92%) reported having sufficient money for tuition, fees, books, and supplies. About two-thirds of the students reported sufficient money for room and board and for college in general. About half of the students reported generally having sufficient funds for medical expenses and for transportation. About one-third of the students reported having sufficient money for clothing and less than 20% reported sufficient funds for recreation. In response to a separate question, approximately two-thirds of the students reported that they budgeted their money successfully during their college years. However, 66% of those interviewed reported

they felt they could have used assistance with or information about successful budgeting while in college.

Several items on the questionnaire also focused on parental influences on education. Results indicated that 72% of the students agreed with this statement, "My parents supported my choice to pursue higher education." Fifty-eight percent of respondents agreed with the statement, "It was important to me to receive my parents' encouragement to stay in school." Eight-four percent of those responding agreed with the statement, "My parents encouraged me to complete high school."

A key section of the questionnaire attempted to identify those factors which facilitated and hindered students while they were attending college or university. Among students who completed their degree or were current students, five factors stood out as the most significant influence factors that helped students to remain in college. Personal motivation was cited by two-thirds as a significant factor, adequate financial support and parental support were mentioned by approximately half of the respondents, and individual faculty who cared and support of friends were cited by one-third of the respondents. The factors that were cited as the most significant obstacles to overcome in order to remain in college were lack of adequate money, which was cited by two-thirds of the respondents, and lack of study skills, poor academic preparation in high school, and lack of child care services, each of which were cited by approximately one-third of the students.

Students who left the college or university prior to finishing their bachelor's degree were asked similar questions regarding factors which helped or hindered them in their college education. Factors most frequently cited as significant reasons for the decision to leave college before completing

the degree were, 1) lack of adequate money (cited by 87% of respondents), 2) taking a job (cited by 35% of respondents), and 3) poor academic preparation in high school (cited by one-fourth of the respondents). Lack of personal motivation was also cited by one-third of the respondents. Factors cited as helpful in completing as much of the college program as they did were, 1) adequate financial support, 2) support of friends, 3) parental support, 4) tribal support, 5) special classes or workshops on study skills, 6) presence of tutoring services.

Two additional questions were asked of those students who had left school prior to receiving a degree. Eight-three percent of these students reported that they would be interested in returning to college if the conditions were right. About 70% of those who would like to return would prefer to go full-time to school, and approximately 30% would prefer to go part-time.

Additional analyses were conducted to determine the relationship between responses to specific questions or items in the interview and the years of retention in college as reported by students. Several significant relationships were discovered using the Spearman correlation coefficient and the Chi Square Statistic for testing significance. Some of these relationships will be described below.

Parent's level of education and parent's attitudes were related to years of retention. Students of parents who had gone further in school were more likely to complete more years of college (mother's education $r = .19$, $p < .05$; father's education $r = .25$, $p < .01$). In addition, students who perceived their parents as supporting their chosen field of study, supporting them financially when they needed funds, and support from high school friends were likely to finish more years of college.

Several other significant relationships were discovered. Those students who had a career goal when entering college were likely to complete more years of college than those who did not enter with a career goal (chi square = 6.5 2' d.f, p .05). Frequency of attendance at Indian student organization meetings was significantly related to college retention (r = .26, p .01).

Interviews with Key Informants

A second key component of the study was interviews with key informants. These interviews were conducted in May and April of 1980 by Dauda Balarabe, Joanne Dahl, Sharon Quello, and Dennis Falk. The seven persons who were interviewed were an Indian college counselor, a chairperson of an Indian studies department, an American Indian student who had completed his undergraduate degree, staff of the Education Development Center and the Indian Studies Program at Bemidji State University, an MCT scholarship officer, and a counselor working with the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. These key informants were asked their views on factors that helped and hindered Indian students in their college education and of their perceptions on changes that would assist Indian students in completing college.

Factors mentioned in promoting retention included, 1) having a larger number of Indian students on a particular campus, providing a core group of peers with whom new students could identify, 2) faculty and staff who show concern for Indian students, 3) parental support, 4) peer support, and 5) support from outside agencies, such as the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. Obstacles identified by these key informants included 1) social factors such as child care and responsibilities to extended family, 2) weakness in student's basic skills of reading, writing and studying, 3) lack of personal motivation and personal problems outside of school leading to poor class

attendance, 4) financial problems, especially in the areas of transportation and child care, and 5) alienation due to cultural differences and curriculum or classes which are culturally biased.

Four suggestions were made by these key informants for things they would change in order to enable more Indian students to complete college. These suggestions were: 1) College administrations should make a major commitment to serve Indian students - not just token efforts; there need to be American Indians employed in upper level administration of the universities and colleges. 2) Improve financial aid packages for Indian students. 3) Provide "pre-college" seminars and more adequate preparation in general for high school students. 4) Faculty and staff should be more accessible to Indian students.

Survey of Service Providers

Another component of the Indian retention study involved a survey of service providers in higher education institutions where Minnesota Chippewa Indians are enrolled. This survey was conducted in the fall of 1980 by Steve Novack, a graduate student in the School of Social Development. Since the majority of students participating in the Tribal Scholarship Program attend colleges and universities in Minnesota, all but one of the eleven service providers surveyed were from institutions in Minnesota. The contact persons for each institution were identified by Larry Aitken and included directors or coordinators of Indian studies and/or support programs, financial aid counselors, and Indian student counselors.

The first set of questions asked in the telephone interviews pertained to services and conditions present at each of the colleges/universities. The results of these questions indicate that an Indian student can find supportive service programs in operation in most institutions. These

services include tutoring, personal counseling, academic counseling, child care, orientation, study skills, financial counseling and career counseling. In addition, most of the institutions have an active Indian student organization.

The next set of survey questions involved service providers' perceptions on Indian retention. Interviewees were asked to rank a list of potential factors which they thought would most significantly contribute to Indian students completing a degree. Three factors that were perceived by providers as significant contributors were good academic preparation in high school, personal motivation, and adequate financial support. Parental support and individual faculty who took an interest in students were other important factors cited.

Secondly, respondents were asked to rank those factors which they thought would be the most significant obstacles that Indian students would have to overcome in order to complete their degree. Lack of personal motivation and lack of good academic preparation in high school received the highest rankings. Again, lack of parental support and lack of individual faculty who took an interest in students were considered important factors.

Another set of questions in the survey asked for interviewee opinions on the importance of institutional efforts aimed at increasing Indian retention. One hundred percent of the respondents thought that "faculty and staff who are American Indians" was either very important or important to the retention of students. Over 90 cercent of the interviewees perceived "special counseling programs" as important or very important to the retention of Indian students. Over 75 percent of the interviewees perceived "Indian student organizations" as important or very important, and 69 percent of the respondents perceived "American Indian Studies Programs" as important or very important to Indian retention.

The interviewees were asked an open-ended question to complete the survey: "What would you do to maximize retention of Indian students?" The element most often mentioned was an overt institutional commitment to improving the retention rate for Indian students, along with appropriate programs and services.

Discussions and Conclusions

Several tentative conclusions will be offered based on the results of this study. First, the support of family and the Indian community is important to Indian students, and efforts to maintain and expand this type of support may help increase retention among Indian students. Results indicate that the support of their families is a key factor in helping students to remain in school and that there is a relationship between parent's educational background and attitudes on the one hand and years of school completed on the other. It is important that the Indian community and Indian families recognize their importance and actively support students if they want them to succeed in college.

Secondly, the results of this study indicate that high schools are not providing adequate preparation to many Indian students with adequate skills and information necessary for them to complete college. A majority of students, and key informants and service providers as well, stated that students were not adequately prepared academically despite graduating from high school. Greater attention to developing basic learning skills, especially study skills, would be helpful in this regard. In addition, students overwhelmingly did not receive information in high school which may have been helpful to them in making informed decisions regarding their college education. For example, Indian students who began college with a

career goal were more likely to complete more years of college. However, over 80% of these students reported that they did not receive information on vocational or career matters in their high school. Efforts should be made to provide these important kinds of information through the high schools.

Thirdly, as high schools may not be able to immediately make the changes suggested above, "pre-college" workshops specifically aimed at meeting the needs of entering Indian students may be helpful in supplementing the services provided by high schools. These seminars could focus on improving basic skills, particularly in study skills; providing information about services available to them in college; and developing skills about budgeting of money. In addition efforts could be made to help entering students clarify their career goals.

Fourthly, results indicate that it would be advisable to examine the financial aid package provided for Indian students. The majority of students described the various funding agencies, especially the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe and Minnesota State Indian Education, as being fair in their financial aid as being adequate to meet needs in the areas of tuition and books and fees. However, lack of adequate funds is most often cited as an obstacle for Indian students in remaining in school. A majority of students reported that they did not have adequate funding for transportation, clothing, and medical expenses while in college. Child care was also cited as an expense for which funding was not available.

Fifth, it is apparent that institutional commitment beginning with top level administrators is important at colleges and universities that serve American Indian students. Support services which provide assistance in developing basic learning skills and in career development are important elements of this commitment. Indian student organizations, or other groups

which provide necessary social support are a part of this commitment also. Indians who serve on the faculty, staff, and administration can provide important support and role models for Indian students. In addition, non-Indian faculty and staff who support and show interest in Indian students are important elements of assisting these students in their college education. While colleges and universities report having many types of supportive services, the fact remains that relatively few students are completing their degrees. The appropriateness and effectiveness of these programs must be examined. Also, while more Indian faculty and staff are present on college campuses, high turnover among these people and lack of Indian administrators is still a problem. Recruitment of Indian administrators and retention of all Indian personnel is crucial.

Sixth, the results of this study indicate that a large majority of students who have left their college program for one reason for another would like to return if conditions were right. These students have also found their college education to be quite valuable to them. It would seem that efforts should be made to determine the conditions which would allow these students to complete their college education. Many of these students did not have the kinds of support when they initially entered school as could be available to them at this point.

In conclusion, this study has collected information about Indian student retention in higher education from a variety of sources. Factors which present obstacles to Indian students and changes which will promote retention have been identified. The most important outcome of this study remains to be determined. If we who are now familiar with the results of the study renew our commitment and act to improve higher education opportunities for Indian students, the impact can be most significant. If we do not act on

this information, the impact will be minimal. Let us hope that each of us will use these results to further our commitment and guide our actions toward improving retention among Indian students.